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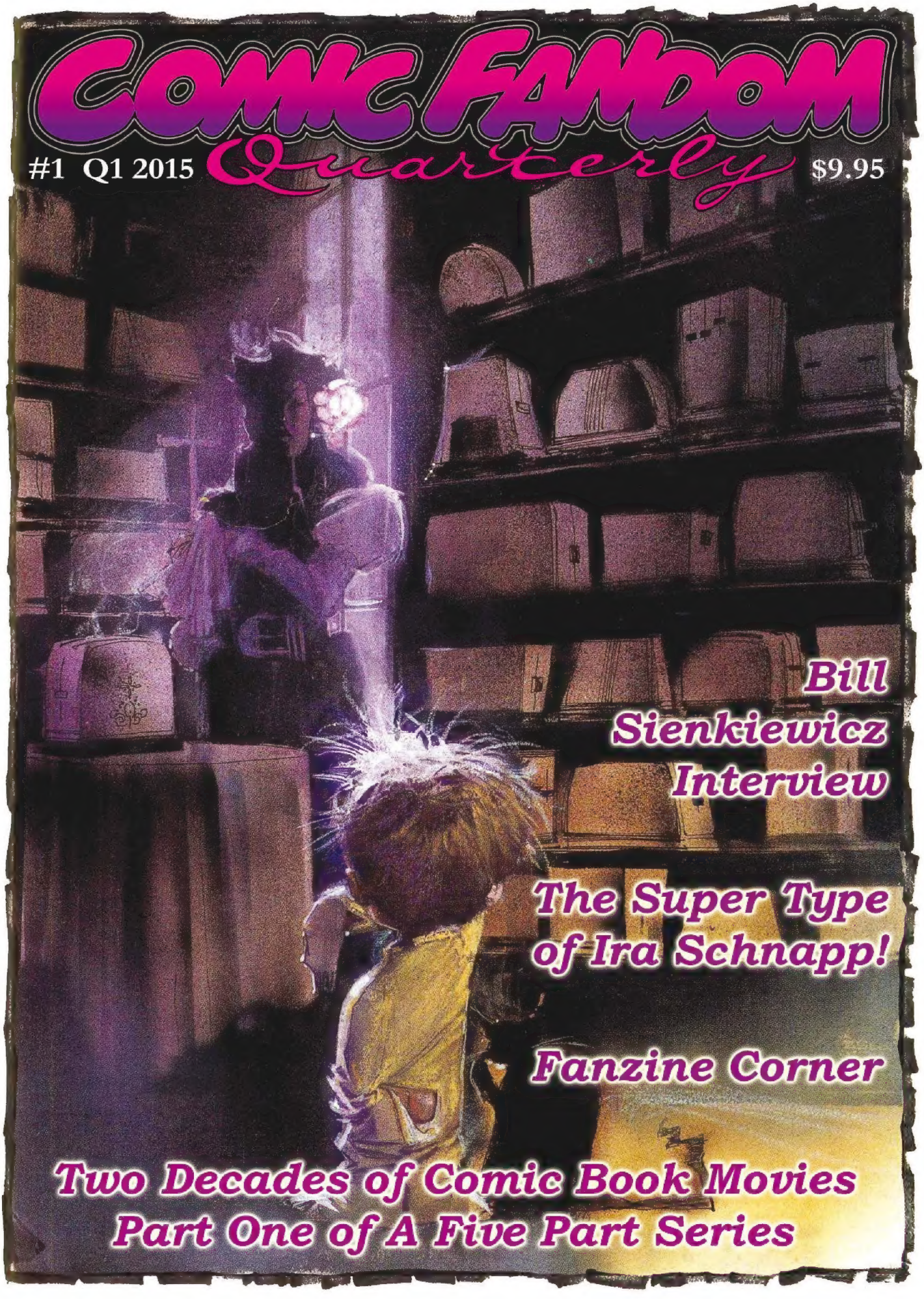

Bill Sienkiewicz Interview

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Robin Dale: We're here with Bill Sienkiewicz - Bill, thanks for being with us today.

Bill Sienkiewicz: My pleasure.

RD: And right off the bat, let's go ahead and get the name out of the way. Go ahead and say your name the way it's pronounced.

BS: Well, if I'm in 'bastard mode' I usually say, well, it's pronounced "Bill"

RD: (laughter) Thank you, thank you, but it is "Sin-Kev-Itch?" correct?

BS: It is "Sin-Kev-Itch" right, yeah.

RD: That's been a source of controversy for years, there's still people that -

BS: Well, it's a source of controversy - although, we've made peace within the family - but, you know, my mother, my sister, went the "sink-a-witz" route, but I figured, the last thing I want to do, if I'm gonna go and be in this field, was to, you know, take "Bernie Schwartz" and become, you know - or what was it, "Marion so-and-so" and become "John Wayne", you know. So I figured I'm proud of my heritage, so I went to my grandfather, who was a coal miner, and I said, 'what's the polish pronunciation?' and he told me, and I said, 'OK' that's my name, and I'm sticking to it. And little did I know, it's like - *Moon Knight* became the book of unpronounceable names, you know? Doug Moench?

RD: How do you say his name?

BS: It's "mencsh" - as in, very close to Jewish for "good guy" and he is, he is.

RD: How did you get into doing art at all, in general?

BS: The kindergarten crayons they give you, they give you these Crayola's with the big flat bottoms, so they wouldn't roll, you know? I think they should institute a law that every artistic device have that.

RD: (laughter)

BS: And plenty of wall space, you know?

RD: (laughter) And how much trouble did you get in to for that?

BS: You know, I don't remember, I either drank too much later on to obliterate it, or I just sort of didn't think anything of it at the time. My father used to - he worked for the phone company at the time working on PBX equipment, which was all of the trunks and making sure that all of the companies - like the insurance companies, the playboy club, banks, they all these separate rooms that were nothing but - you walk in and it was just row upon row of these whirring, clicking relays and everything else, Very surreal, but very, very cool.

One of the places he used to go to was the newspaper, and when it would get down to the roll of the newsprint that was too small, they would just tear off the rest, and give my father what they could no longer use. Which, for me, I mean, it was newsprint, but it was almost two and a half feet tall, and I would just tear off these sections and just make my own homemade lightbox - I pulled open a drawer, and tinfoil, and I learned wiring from my father, so I rigged up a fluorescent light and made my very first lightbox.

RD: How old were you then?

BS: I was in grammar school, I think.

RD: So how do we get from there to comics?

BS: I always loved comics, it's in the blood, I mean, it's sort of like Arthur Miller said that, he didn't choose playwriting, playwriting chose him. It was just, you know, a kindred thing, a kindred spirit, like the ability to go into another world and get lost and to be able to create that, you know? And especially the sob-story part of it, growing up in a, let's say, dysfunctional household, which I think is part-and-parcel, that's a requisite, to be in any field, you know? It just sort of became part of the way to escape.

RD: When you started to get into the illustration and practice that, is that what you were you thinking comics, or were you just wanting to do art, or were you thinking art for a career, or something in art?

BS: In second grade I remember we used to have the loose-leaf notebooks with the blue line, and I remember making episodic comics for my friends, you know, it's like 'what will happen in the next adventure of.' Whether they were exciting or not, my friends were very, very enthusiastic and they couldn't wait - and the teacher was like, "what notes are you passing?" you know, and they look at it, and what could she say?

Then when I was in third grade - there were things that I remember, my mother going to the PTA meeting, and she didn't tell me, she never told me, it was my teacher, one of my favorite teachers, who in a way became a surrogate - all of my teachers, my female teachers, became my surrogate mom's, you know, which led to some very conflicting feelings, you know, because it was like - they're very nurturing and everything else. When I would talk to Mrs. Harper, she once told me, she said, "Bill draws all the time" and we used to have to do a daily journal, and some kids it was like pulling teeth, and I would just draw and write, and draw and write, and I filled up like stacks and stacks of these little green [books] with parodies and writing and *Star Trek* stories, and just cartoons and creating characters, and my best friend in grammar school had a 3 letter last name, which I envied him for. He's actually a reporter for the *Newark Star Ledger*, so he writes a column, so he stayed with the writing. So we keep in touch, not nearly as often as I like.

But the teacher did say "Bill draws all the time" and my mother's response was "Yeah I know, and I really wish he would stop that." The teacher did have the wherewithal to say that "I think that if he keeps at this he may be able to make a living" and to this day - my mother passed away years ago. She never understood what it is I drew, or what it is I did, I mean literally - it sounds very harsh but, there's like the idiot-savant, who's like very gifted, and my mother was in a lot of respects a child, you know, and it's like I could do a drawing of a chair, and she would think it was me, and I could do a drawing of me, like sitting in front of a mirror and making sure I got the likeness as close as I could get it, you know? [But it was like] "Is that Dean Martin?" In a way she did me a favor, because I was going to be damn sure that I was going to do something that was going to make it click. So in a way she set the bar really high by - I hesitate to say her ignorance, but I think it was it was ignorance mixed with a level of trying to dissuade me, you know, plus a whole bunch of like Freudian, you know, stuff that - we're not paying for a session, so...

RD: (laughter)

BS: All I know is that my father was much more of an art critic, an imposing figure, you know, because he wanted to be an artist but he stopped, and he had a lot of talent, especially in lettering which is one area that I admittedly - I mean my style of lettering suits my - like if I do a Steadman-type artwork, it suits it, you know? I can do like flourishes or whatever. My lettering tends to look more like artwork than lettering, so in a way its like what I said about Stan Drake doing an illustration of a cartoonist as opposed to being a cartoonist. I was an illustrator doing an impression of a letterist, you know? I mean my lettering pretty much sucks wind. I give those guys a lot of credit. I always was just more concerned with the drawing.

RD: How did you get into comics then? After you went through all that and worked out your style and stuff, how did you actually get into comics? Did you go through fandom, or did you have to spend a lot of time -

BS: Well I went to art school in Newark, New Jersey. I was raised in northern New Jersey which was called the icebox of New Jersey, it was the coldest country in the entirety of the state of New Jersey. It was one of those places I couldn't wait to get - I mean, I loved it because, you know, we'd get 6 inches of snow, when it snowed it was none of this sort of pansy-stuff -

RD: (laughter) Flurries, right?

BS: where it's like a few flakes here and there, or the 'threat' of snow, and then everybody gets in their giant Hummers and goes out and acts like they're the *Donner* party, you know?

RD: (laughter)

BS: The most that they're gonna have to spend is like 2 days inside with one another. [It's not like today] most kids "go to your room" - OK! Fine, I've got my cellphone, my xbox, it's like "thanks!"

RD: (laughter) Yeah like "big deal." A little different back then.

BS: And I didn't mind, I mean, I would lock myself away in my room anyway, except that I had no door on my room, so there were no boundries, it was very weird. My father, we bought what was an old parsonage, their mortgage was $30 a month, and they bought the house for like $6000. He did a lot of the work himself and ended up taking off my door until he finished the flooring, and it was one of those things he just decided it was easier to leave the door off. So I always felt a lack of privacy, so it only furthered my going deeper and deeper into that place of shutting everything out.

So I ended up just putting up like a kind of a curtain, to provide some degree of privacy. But I decided that - after I had gone to art school, I had grown up loving Neal Adams artwork, and being the only kid in the entirety of Sussex county who loved comics, and drew comics, you know, I mean I had the looseleaf binders and stuff like that, thick ones, that I remember drawing and coloring, and I remember giving one to somebody who wanted to read it overnight, and I never got it back. I still to this day, it's like, you know -

RD: (laughter) It still rankles, doesn't it?

BS: Oh it still! I would give anything. I know people from art school, from my first year of art school, I know the guy who has my very first sketchbook, and all I have to do is call him and tell him I want it back, but it's like "you keep it." Actually I've been thinking of calling him, because there was one poem that was like lyrics to a song so I decided to, I think I'm gonna call up and say "just xerox this page and send it to me, don't worry, and by the way how the hell are you?"

RD: (laughter)

BS: Art school really opened my eyes, I got to learn a lot about illustrators other than Neal Adams, because up until that point, Neal Adams was the penultimate, and without anything to compare it to, I didn't really find out that there was such a thing as a 'clone,' you know? All the negatives associated with it, the old sticks-and-stones, well I found out that once I got into the business, it *did* hurt, I felt invisible.

RD: You spent all that time working on your -

BS: Yeah I was determined to be, like, I mean I absorbed Neal. At first I hated it because, when he started doing all his covers for DC, I mean I was a Curt Swan guy, you know? When he started doing all the covers, it's a classic 'I get this all the time' I just couldn't stand it.

RD: 'It's not what I'm used to so it's not good' right?

BS: Yeah, exactly! And then he did something on the inside, or something, and gradually I came around, and it just caught me and I decided to give it another look and I was hooked.

RD: Once you got it -

BS: It was *Something About Mary*, you know? Anything I could get my hands on from that point on, and I just dissected everything. I studied anatomy - Bridgman, and Victor Perard, and I went to art school to study the masters and life drawing, and also fine artists, like even contemporary abstract expressionists like Helen Frankenthaler, Franz Kline, Kurt Schwitters who did like 'found objects', so in a way art could be all of these things, and here I was looking, you know, at comics and thinking, "it's all these little drawings and little boxes, why can't it be all of these other things?" it doesn't make any sense.

One of my teachers, who has since passed on, who played at Carnegie Hall, he became like a father to me in a way, I mean, it was this huge imposing black guy, you know, but he had a really interesting way of speaking. If he thought something was great, he'd call it dangerous - "that is just dangerous." Unfortunately he smoked, and I who hated smoking, it was like, I started then, you know, and the drinking, so I basically a country kid drinking old English malt and smoking Kool's you know? Eb from Green Acres wanting to be an urban black kid, you know? I'd get to Newark just in time to see the transvestites walking home, you know, with the high-heel pumps on and their 5-o-clock shadow, you know?

RD: (laughter)

BS: Or their 7-AM shadow or whatever it was. But it was an eye-opening experience. All of my friends were all older, they were going to graduate. So I had a second year - second year I caused a lot of problems because you had to choose between - first year every student had the same curriculum, it was a basic course. Second year you could choose between fine art, illustration or advertising. And I said, "why choose? why not a little bit of each?" And it made perfect sense to me but it made no sense, or they just felt it was a problem, you know? So they really tried to corral me into choosing one, and I used to get into fights with the teachers, and I would just walk out of class, and I'd go like 2 doors down and go into life drawing class. If you think about it, it wasn't like I was skipping school, you know, I wasn't going out and doing a doobie in the parking lot, though I do remember doing one the day Norman Rockwell died - "this is for you, Norman!" Me and my friends, you know?

So they all graduated, my older friends graduated. I decided the graduation day, [I would] take 30 days, and work up a portfolio of DC Comics, because I didn't think my stuff was good enough for Marvel. Because Neal's work on the covers is what switched me over to Marvel. I found it was much more dull in *Merry Marvel Marching Society*, it was much more of a family, and then it just sort of exploded into this whole thing of - it fueled the fire of my love for comics. I just put on my big plaid pants and my Seersucker Suit -

RD: (laughter)

BS: - my Eiffel Tower Tie, you know? I got ribbed like crazy, but Vinnie Colletta to his credit, I had no appointment, he said "I'd love to give you work but you're gonna be out on the street in two weeks because of this implosion they are going through

RD: Ohh you came in at that time, late 78/79.

BS: And he called up Neal, and I walked up to Neal's studio with a guy named Tony DiPreta, and I remember standing and talking to Chris Adams and a bunch of other guys, you know, gals and guys. Mike Nasser, I remember meeting Mike, who just stopped and started looking at my stuff, he pressed the elevator button, and he just sort of looked through my work and he kept slowing down and he's looking at it, and they had one of those portholes in the elevator, and he got in the elevator and the last thing I remember was the porthole going down, and he was just staring at me as the -

RD: (laughter) and out of frame!

BS: Yeah, and I was like nervous, and Neal came in and he looked through my stuff and he was very complimentary, he called up Jim Shooter

at Marvel and said "I've got a guy for you, I want to send him over, but the only problem is he draws like me." And I'd see other guys try to do Neal, which gave me a little bit of a push to give it a go, and I figured if I didn't make it, I had another year of art school, so I had nothing to lose, you know, really.

So I went in and I met with guys like Ralph Macchio, and Rick Marshall, and Shooter. Shooter was the tallest human being I had ever met in my life. And I left literally that day, not just with a job, but really basically with a career. On *Moon Knight*, I mean, it was mixed in terms of my response. One was, wow I did it! And the other one was, who in the hell is *Moon Knight*?

RD: (laughter) Happy to be working but not sure about who you're working on.

BS: Someone said, if DC can't do *Batman* right, at least Marvel can. So I went, in my you know, competitive mind, got it, okay. That I could do. That was sort of the beginning, and Joe Rubenstein sort of glommed on to me immediately, and was just sort of rapid fire questions, questions, questions, you know, to the point of causing me to stumble around with my like stutter and trying to respond, and making me very very nervous. And then, having the coup de grace, which was, "Oh are you another one of those artists with a speech impediment?" You know, it was like, and I said, ok this is one field that you have to develop - it's not all the art and the panel. You're dealing with personalities. So that was it. I just remember drawing like Neal, and getting a lot of accolades at first, and then a lot of criticism - "it looks like Bill Sienkiewicz has learned to draw like Neal Adams" ellipses, period, you know?

I used to keep sketchbooks and drawing from fashion illustration, and just everything that I couldn't put in to comics, and my goal was to get the stuff in my sketchbooks into comics. If a building felt old, why did it have to be a ruled line? If someone was yelling, why did you have to adhere to the extent of the mandibles could get? Which is one of the reasons I think why I liked Neal's stuff, because he pushed it, just enough.

RD: Yeah he would have people with their mouth wide-open yelling like that it was quite a sight.

BS: Yeah and the double lighting, and you know, it was very dramatic. And there was that sense of foreshortening, you just knew he knew his shit, he really just knew his shit.

I just gradually started to put elongated figures, like if the women were in there, I started like doing more type fashion illustration, you know? Like leaving things out and everything wasn't so rendered, you know, and plus I started getting into design, which was a big, big thing for me. I realized that what kept people coming back was not the drawing, and this is one of the things I learned from art school, is if you turned something upside down, and it still held together as an abstract shape, then people would come back. It was like, that's what people were responding to.

And it wasn't until like issue #26, or in the 20's, where I really started using my anger about being called a clone, like "I'll show them" kind of thing. The best revenge is, like, I was just gonna do it, you know? No matter what.

I was always into music, and Zeppelin was big, I was a total Led-Head, AC/DC, you know, plus Lynyrd Skynyrd, to country, to rock 'n roll, everything. I was the definition of eclectic, in every way, shape or form. And I remember getting the "No you can't do that" from the people that were the closest to me, you know? It's like, "That's not the way things are done," where the editors were among the most receptive. Especially guys like Ralph Macchio and Ann Nocenti. When I did my stint on the *New Mutants*, she was just like, "Go for it!" I owe a lot of what I was able to do to them, because they could have shut me down very easily, you know, and sort of made it a living nightmare.

RD: So they became more facilitators than obstructionists.

BS: Oh absolutely, and I've worked with editors who shall remain nameless, who were sort of the walking dead - they'd show up, but they wouldn't respond. I'd try to do something that would generate a "WOW!" or at least a looksee, and it's like, "Well, what do you think?" and it was like "Ohhh oh yea, fine, fine." And I remember I wanted to ink my own stuff, and "Hit It!" was a story that had a whole musical kind of beat to it, was the story I wrote, I was supposed to get co-plotting and co-writing credit on it, but I was late because of some convention. I found that after that issue, I was done with *Moon Knight*. It was like I had done everything -

RD: *You* were done, you were like, "I don't want to do this anymore?"

BS: Yeah, it's like there just comes a point when - *Moon Knight* was not about *Moon Knight*. *Moon Night* was Ed Sullivan. It was a group book, you know, and it's like "Right now, we've got Frenchie over here" and it was all of these characters interacting, and *Moon Knight* was the sort of primal force that sort of stepped in at the last minute. In a way like *Elektra* tended to be. You never really got to know, or what you get what be snippets, or just slight insights into "Man, these characters are seriously off their rockers." So after I did the *New Mutants*, and the *New Mutants* was immediately after Sal Buscema, and I loved Sal's stuff. There wasn't a guy's work out there that I didn't at one time or another find myself stealing from, you know? From Frank Robbins, to the world of comics and art.

Part of the reason I went back to Neal Adams when I did my portfolio as opposed to the fine art or whatever was because that was the definition, doing comics, and I wanted to facilitate getting into comics, you know? It was an assembly line process - this guy puts in the windshield, which meant you were the letterer. I built the chassis or whatever, so that meant I was the penciller. The writer was the guy who put the engine in. I remember wanting to ink my own stuff, because nobody was capturing what I wanted to do.

RD: And since you were getting more and more illustrative and -

BS: Yeah, it was like, they were trying to genericize it, if there is such a word. I was trying to get farther and further and just generally "No! no! no!" I don't want you to use a ruler, and they didn't get that, and it's like all those little bricks, you know, and patterns of bricks all done by freehand, it's like, things overlapping, lines that go through objects that looks more sketchy. I want that.

RD: You want less of that pristine look.

BS: Yeah. I mean it's like, Gil Kane, I've inked Gil Kane, and he would draw so meticulously which such a nail practically. I mean I remember the running joke was you'd pour ink over Gil's pages and then you'd run it under tap water, and whatever stayed in the grooves was it, you know?

RD: (laughter)

BS: Like I said, I got a lot of encouragement for that, for trying different things. The letters we got after I took over *New Mutants* were everything from "Wow!" to "Stop him Jim before he kills again!" I mean, people took their stuff very seriously.

RD: And at this point in your career, that transition took, not a very long time, from the more neo-Neal Adams to the painted/illustrative, almost abstract kind of looking stuff that you do. I was collecting back in the day, and there was definitely a wide range of opinions on that. How long did it take for people to really kind of embrace that?

BS: The one reaction, Frank Miller and I we really bonded, at the time we were kind of like the only two guys who came in within a year of each other, and when I wanted to ink my own stuff - cause Frank had started in the Eisner/Gil Kane sort of school and then gradually started pushing more in his own direction. We were both very positive advocates for each other just going for it. We were gonna be the next generation, so if we didn't support each other now, you know?

And there were guys who I get along with great now, but at the time it was difficult, you know, and for whatever reason the responses...it felt like every step was like climbing, I don't even want to say Mount Everest because in a lot of respects Mount Everest is a relatively - and not that I've done it - it's a relatively easy climb compared to K2, which has claimed more lives than you know. It felt like it was taking a lot longer than it actually was, and I remember just letting all of it out and the editors were behind me, and it was literally I felt like an unstoppable machine. I never saved an idea. I put a stroke down, and that was the stroke. I didn't mess with it, I didn't overwork stuff. I had too many ideas that I wanted to do and I just let it all fly. I realized that what I was doing was, I was painting and correcting at the same time. I got to be able to work really fast with acrylics. I'd always liked oils. Acrylics tended to dry too fast, but I got to work with acrylics so rapidly that I could wipe stuff out and get a lot of oil-type effects, if I wanted to. It felt like it took a lot longer than it actually did, to get the stuff out there. At that point I tried the airbrush, and it just facilitated a lot of the things I wanted to get across.

Just about the time the editors were starting to get pressure from their editors, I was just about ready to leave [*Moon Knight*] and move on to, in essence, greener pastures. And I had a chance after *Moon Knight* to take over *The X-Men*, and I turned it down. My wife at the time thought I was insane because I was turning down a high profile book, I was turning down like lots and lots of money. I always felt, and I still do, if you do work that you believe in and it's honest work, that the money follows. It may take a while, but it's there. If you follow the money, forget it, you'll end up miserable, and I've had to do a few of those in my life, and every one it's like - I was gonna say if I had any wisdom teeth to have yanked, they would have been gone a long time ago anyway.

So I said give me books that are about to be cancelled, or ones that are really low profile, or that you're not sure about, and Chris Claremont and stopped me in the hallway at Marvel one day and he said "I want you to do a three issue series based on Danielle Moonstar." They [*New Mutants*] were called the X-Babies at the time, they were younger, and I wanted to make them a little bit older where puberty was starting to affect them so they each had their own silhouette , you know. Like Cannonball had that sort of trapezoid head shape, and Wolfsbane I think I made her a lot more wolfish.

The ultimate for me was creating Warlock, because I got so fed up with all of those years of, I mean, I trained, I was reading medical text books as soon as I started to learn how to read. The graphics images were, you know, I mean, it's like a version of hypochondria, when they study it, they think like "well I've had that symptom." And to a kid, it was like - because I was also trying to figure out why my mother didn't love me, and all that other kinda session-crap. I figured, well, if I read enough medical journals, I could fix it, and then that way, it would all be, you know, cookies and milk and willy wonka chocolate factory stuff.

The idea of taking the characters and making them slightly older, and doing the [Demon] Bear issues, and I was really into Hunter S. Thompon at the time, and Steadman, and that was about as far away from Neal Adams you could get visually. And Hunter Thompson's writing was about as far away as anything I had read, it made a great deal of sense to me, plus it was anarchy, you know? I loved it, you know. Anybody who told me "No" it was like they better have a damn good reason. And if they had a damn good reason, I was gonna come back with a damn good reason why I should ignore them. It wasn't an angry kind of response, it was just that I knew what I wanted to try, I had to try it, I just had to try -

RD: You had that boundry, you just had to push past it and see -

BS: Yeah, it was like, I can't say it was a passive-aggressive thing, it was just, I needed to know. I mean I was raised Catholic, but you know, like they have the 12-step programs, so I consider myself a recovering Catholic.

RD: (laughter)

BS: The whole guilt thing and everything else. But I didn't want to be on like, the good lord willing, or whatever deity, he or she or it or cloud being

that you believe in, or none at all. I didn't want to have regrets, be on my death bed, if I live to be 90 or whatever, or with genetics like 200, and have this regret that you know, "I really should have tried x, y or z" you know? What's the worst that could have happened? I mean, it wasn't brain surgery.

Although the responses I used to get, it was worse than brain surgery to people because it was as if I *was* a brain surgeon via Dr. Mengele, you know? It's like, if I would tell people at a cocktail party or in a bar or something, what I did, they looked at me like I also teased small woodland creatures with power tools. So I finally I just decided I was gonna goof on the whole thing, I said I'm a pastry chef.

RD: (laughter) Or a respectable job.

BS: Or I made pizza. To me it was like, at the end of the day, I knew I made x-number of pies, it's like, a job was done, it was a finite number of things and it was done! If that were the situation, I would never really go to sleep wondering or having to wake up at like 4 in the morning and go back to a piece of artwork and go "this is bugging me that this is not done!" It's like I just had to go back into it.

And every one has gone through their travails and their tough times, you know, who made their work mature. I remember when I first started out doing watercolor, because I'd divide my time between doing acrylics (which dry very fast) and doing watercolors in like it's a chess game where you think 7 moves ahead. Watercolor teaches you what you don't know, and artwork in general teaches you what you don't know. It's like "Oh, you *think* you know what you're doing? Well, I'm gonna kick your ass!"

RD: (laughter) Keep you on your toes, right?

BS: And I need that. It does definitely keep me on my toes, you know?

RD: Something that challenges you. Obviously you've done this for a long time now, but that must be something that's, well not only a rush, but something that is maybe is a little bit is to challenge yourself all the time and come up with something and surprise yourself maybe?

BS: And that is the harder thing more and more is to do that, because there was a period of time when I was doing - especially a lot of stuff in my sketchbooks, or just a piece in general where I would go - especially on *Elektra* for example. I would do it, and I would bring the pages in, and I would go, "I don't know what to make of this because it doesn't look like me." As if I had some pre-conception of what my work would look like.

But I will say this, I will say that whenever I'm in a kind of a groove where it's a transcendent kind of groove, and if it sounds new-agey, then so be it. Every time it's happened, I've gotten deja-vu, as if this is where I'm supposed to be at this particular time, and it means I'm on the right course, you know? As if I've done this before, and I don't know what it is, but I just look at it as a sign and I just roll with it, you know? And I've found that when my work in the comics would be more light and fun, the work in the sketchbooks would get much more illustrative and darker and grotesque, and vice versa. So I always allowed both halves of, you know, the mirror to come out. I think people need that.

My watercolor teacher told me years ago when I first started taking watercolor classes, "You have the potential to be a really wonderful watercolorist, but what you need is you need maturity. You need to have your heart broken a couple of times." And at the time I was like really rankled to hear it. It's like, oh yeah, I'm looking forward to that!

And unfortunately or fortunately it's Nietzschian, it's like whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger, you know. Plus along the Nietzschian thing, we despise that which we most resemble. Which always leads me to wonder about why the Republicans hated Clinton so much, what skeletons were in their closet, you know? It does hold to be true that it makes you stronger, and as a result, what I expect of myself is I don't want to do just like a super hero punch-out comic unless I do a parody of it, you know?

It's like, for example, there's a certain newspaper strip, it's a one panel strip, and it comes in a circle, and it involves a family, and I won't mention the name of it. It's cute, you know, and it's light hearted and everything else, and what I thought would be fun to do would be to do something like "Oh, isn't it cute the things that kids say?" It's a chuckle, a little chuckle. I just thought I'm gonna play it completely straight, and do kind of my version of that, except have the kid say absolutely nothing that's worth a chuckle, just stuff kids say and then put it out there and have people scratch their heads going "This isn't funny." It's just stupid, and to me that is subversive, you know?

I'm not so much of a storyteller as I'm more into theme albums kind of thing. Like I listen to the Neil Young soundtrack for *Dead Man*, the Jim Jarrmusch film, and it's one of my favorite soundtracks. Or Vangelis. There's mood. The Cure, even the Cure. When I say "Even the Cure" I'm talking about as opposed to Vangelis. I remember listening to *Disintegration* a lot. Robert Plant, same thing. And I'm one of those people who will find something, an album or a CD, play it to death and then not listen to it for a long time, you know? With Vangelis or with The Cure, and speaking of Robert Smith, The Cure is one of my favorite groups. *Disintegration* was their top for me. I remember seeing them live at the Meadowlands, and I read in the booklet that Robert Smith's favorite comic was *Elektra Assassin*. I thought, well I gotta get in touch with them because what I'd love to do is a visualization of a song called *The Same Deep Water as You*.

I like music that has almost a mantra-like quality to it, which is why I like a lot of Zeppelin stuff. *Since I've Been Loving You*, there's riffs they keep coming back to, a lot of stuff has that. Vangelis will do it. In *Blade Runner* - so few people I talk to attribute the success of that movie to the soundtrack. I mean, that music *felt* that it is that time period, you know? And I want to do comics that evoke those kinds of emotions. I mean there are people who tell great stories, you know, and I want to people to know just the characters and I want people to know the moods. And I suppose that's

something that, I think that's what I'm aiming for eventually, it's going more in that direction.

RD: Well I do know there was a bit of a running joke with your art that was changing at the time, that people were always saying stuff like, well what's he on and where can I get some?

BS: I mean, I just had a conversation with a friend of mine who unfortunately just tried to do himself in, and he's very, very angry at the world at large and doing some incredibly inappropriate things, and I feel horrible for him and he's off his meds and things like that. Be that as it may, I mean, he said that the running joke, or the running truth, on 'good authority' over the internet or whatever, was that all the money I made from *Big Numbers* went up my nose. Again, from a recovering Catholic, put my hand on a Bible means nothing so all that I have is my word, is that I've never touched cocaine in my life, or heroin or anything like that.

Because, one, I drank a lot, I smoked cigarettes a lot. I smoked 2 or 3 packs of cigarettes a day, I could drink a case of beer a day. I mean, I had my vices, you know, so it's like I didn't need to - and I was comfortable with that, because they were good-old country-boy vices, you know? I could wear my shit-kickers and get out there on the dance floor and work up some liquid courage and thats what we did. One of the reasons I never got into the illicit drugs, and I mean, I've seen people do it, I've been offered it, and I just said no. Because I was sure I would like it. I mean, I wouldn't have had the car I had. And I wanted to be lucid enough, and clear enough, to do the work...like the work itself was the drug. So, why do an Elvis, you know? Why bring myself up and then take the bennies to bring myself down. It's like there's no better high than a piece of artwork where I could look at it and go, "It doesn't suck." So I didn't need any of that other stuff. And when I quit drinking for like 20 years. Now if I drink it's like I'll sip a single malt scotch or something like that. I haven't touched a beer in ages, or cigarettes in almost 20 years. I used to run like 60 miles a week, that was like my full-time job. It was obsessive, I tended to be obsessive/compulsive.

RD: That would probably surprise nobody who has seen your work.

BS: Yeah. If I put it into the work and the exercise and everything I guess that was a good way of manifesting itself.

RD: Not only getting out like therapy, but also doing something constructive with it, right?

BS: Yeah. Hopefully, hopefully. At the very least, it was getting it out, and getting it out in a form that maybe touched somebody and changed somebody. When I did *Stray Toasters* I had more women who came to me in tears and hugged me and said "You've changed my life" moreseo than the men, men were like into much more of the Batman/Superman thing. Whereas, to me, I look at comics as viable a storytelling medium as any. When I did the Moby Dick Classics Illustrated, I wouldn't do it again because I believe comics can be their own classics, look at *Maus* for an example. And I was sick and tired of reading movie reviews where, like, oh lets say, Jack Michaels or Jane Bernard, whom I know peripherally, she interviewed me for *Starlog* or whatever, where they would say "The ridiculous comic book-styled dialogue gives this movie..." and it was always a derrogation, always in a negative, until of course comic book movies started making money and they started doing them quote "right" and digital came into it and everything else. I said I would love to read a review that said "The awful movie style-dialogue..."

RD: (laughter)

BS: And lo and behold, you wait long enough and it happens, you know? And I do think that comics are on their way, if not already, I mean guys like Neil Gaiman, and certainly Alan Moore, David Mack, Kyle Baker, I mean the list goes on and on of people who have pushed boundries and a lot of the guys from Alan Speigel, George Pratt, and so many names I'm sure I'm forgetting, oh and John Van Fleet to Jill Thompson.

I mean I was walking through the convention here yesterday and just looking at all the comics and the backdrops, are all people who are *doing it*, who are really out there, putting their money where their mouth is, and their ability. It's like they have something that they want to say, and unfortunately it's like there's just so much, there's a glut. And one of the particular problems I have doing it is that I don't get out and really see much of what's out there. Having gotten into a certain Manga and different forms of filmmaking too like watching a lot of Japanese horror films like *Cure* or the original *The Ring*, or *Uzumaki* where it's sort of like *The Ring* taken to the next level where everything goes into spirals, it's like people become snails. They have such an interesting way of doing things, you know?

It's inspiring to see what's out there. I don't necessarily agree with a lot of what's being done because I don't think the big T&A thing - I think of myself more as a Neil Young or a Beck, you know? It's not about showing big breasts and like wasps waist or you know, it's about getting it out whatever it is, and it can be in a lyrical kind of format, it can be obtuse, it can be the word saying one thing and the visual saying another and where they overlap and come together they form a much more powerful combination than either one separately. The sum of the parts is greater than either one separately. To see what's out there is really just inspiring, because everybody out there is trying to find their own niche. I wish them all the best, and the stuff, it may have a sales figure or run of then 10's of thousands or in the thousands, but that's also part and parcel of the digital age, you know? One of my friends that I grew up with grammar school who collects a certain kind of tractor. I don't remember the kind of tractor, it's one of the earliest tractors ever made and he has one of the largest collections, and he's the president of this like consortium of tractor enthusiasts. No matter what you're in to, there are people of a like mind, so you're reaching the core audience.

I always found with my own style, when I did *Moon Knight*, if my fanbase was a table and I had x-number of people on it, when I changed over to the *New Mutants*, I had a lot of people who suddenly forgot my birthday, who suddenly jumped off the table, and then a whole group who climbed on. So I always had a fanbase, even with the New Mutants, there was always a group of people who stayed with me no matter what. And I felt really blessed about that, you know, and I hate to keep using these Catholic references, it just pisses me off when I use them.

RD: (laughter) So appropriate though. Well I know that a lot of other artists within comics, and even illustrative artists, really admire your work. I've talked with several of the comic artists, and you're an artists' artist. They're all like "Bill, oh yeah, love his stuff."

BS: It's nice to hear. I admit I'm always sort of mystified by that. It's great to hear, I have to admit, but to me it's like I'm learning. If I've influenced anybody, one of the joys is in turn being influenced by them, you know? Because I think in a way that's what we're here for, to learn, and build on top of what's been done before. Even if it amounts to "God *damn* it why didn't I think of that??" It's like the obvious staring you in the face.

You know when I came up with Ken Wind from *Elektra*, part of it was the solution of the xerox head, he became the perfect politician, you know, with 2 expressions and just like 2-faced. And also I didn't feel like I had the ability to make him look - I didn't want to give him emotions, I didn't want to make him human, you know? It was like he was a cypher for me, and avatar, a *thing*. And you can do that in comics. The only time I've really seen that done well is watching like the *Lion King* on broadway with the mask and that kind of stuff. Julie Taymor is just brilliant with masks and hiding and having what is behind, having the mask represent something. It's been done throughout history.

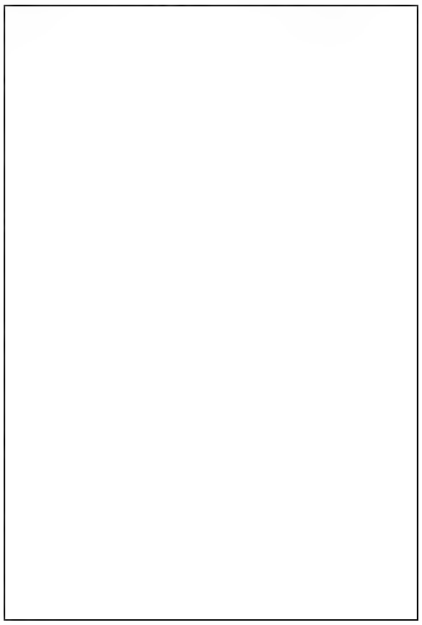
RD: You take those things and tweak them just a little bit, and turn them 90 degrees or 45 degrees metaphorically speaking and suddenly you've got something like you said like "wow, that's it!" That works, that's the way it should be, whatever, you get that reaction to it.

BS: Well, thanks, yeah I mean in a way that's sort of how I felt, and I felt that way about Elektra too, and I always felt that by not showing her eyes, you couldn't tell what was going on with her. Whereas Garret, he was our entry point into the comic, I mean he was entirely out there. He was lying around in SHIELD underwear and you know, it's like he was falling asleep, snoring like Dagwood Bumstead wearing a really horrible hairpiece that was sort of drilled in and stapled, and big guns. It was like he was over the top, you know? He exercised absolutely no restraint whatsoever. I found that that was the fun part. He was certainly not the Mary Tyler Moore of the newsroom, you know? Because there's always one character that's the sane one around which everyone [else] who is in the loony bin, welcome to the monkey house, or one flew over the cuckoos nest. I shouldn't be here, I shouldn't be here, but yet here I am trying to make sense of all this insanity. And sometimes I get confused as to whether I'm Jack Nicholson or one of the others, or Nurse Ratchet. In keeping with the theme of eclecticism.

RD: Yes, exactly. And that's certainly something that people have undoubtedly seen in your work. You can probably look at it numerous times and always pick something out of there and go "I wonder what that line represented or what you were doing" when you did that line or that circle or whatever.

BS: There are pieces I look at now and I go "That was done by a different guy" you know? It's like that was me then, now I have a whole different thing I'm going for, and I don't know what it is yet. I'm in the process of finding out, and it's a little bit hellacious but it's also kind of exciting, you know?

RD: You're one of those people that's able to actually almost imprint your personality into their work in such a way that it's just pure expression like that. "This is what's in my head", not just in your head, but what's in *you*, and you just put it all on the page, like you were talking about earlier about being honest. I think people respond to that, because they see that honesty, they see that's it's not a style you've studied or something you've developed because you'd be commercially successful or popular. It's something you do just because it's the way you see it, and the way you see things come out and that you have to do it that way, and people just cue right into that.

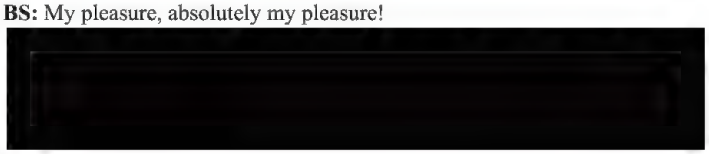


BS: I can't help it, I really can't. Nor, I think if I were given the opportunity to help it, as if it's something that I felt really needed help, you know? Which I found the problem with *X-Men 3*, if you could turn something to ice or whatever or lift a truck or bend a crane, do something with metal, it's like would you wanna give that up, you know?

I mean there are days I wish I could play shortstop for the Yankees, sure. There are days I wish I could play guitar like Jimmy Page, but all in all I'm pretty happy with the lot in my life. In the quote "glut" or the panoply of everything that's out there, under the rubric of a classification, which is redundant, but it's something that I think that's what I'm aiming for eventually, it's going more in that direction.

RD: Well thank you Bill, I really appreciate you sitting with us today and talking with us. You've been fantastic, very fascinating, very interesting.

BS: My pleasure, absolutely my pleasure!



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Two Decades of Comic Book Movies Part 1

Building The Foundations

We are living in a golden age of comic book movies. It has been a long time coming, and many comic fans are feeling joy and vindication at finally seeing quantity and quality comic book based movies on the big screen.

This series of articles will be focusing primarily on comic book based live-action super hero movies. We will be looking at the path comic book movies took to get to where we are today, along with their cultural and commercial impact. Part 1 of this article will focus on some of the earlier efforts, but otherwise will deal primarily with the 90s period to the present with the more independent comic book movies.

Early Efforts

Before there were movies about super heroes, there were the serials. These were short 7-10 minute segments broken up into (usually) 12 or 15 chapters and would run in front of various movies on a weekly basis. These serialized "movies" were the first attempts to bring super heroes to the silver screen.

The very first comic book super hero based serial was *The Adventures of Captain Marvel* (1941), just 1 year after the debut of the character. He even beat Superman to the screen, though the Superman shorts were animated and not a serialized story. Batman followed in 1943 and 1949, Captain America in 1944, and Superman in 1948, 1950 and 1951. Other comic book non-super hero serials would appear as well, such as *Dick Tracy*, *Congo Bill, Spy Smasher,* and *Blackhawk.*

All of the serials of this time were cheaply and quickly made, with only a passing familiarity with the characters painted in the broadest strokes. Special effects, when present, were crude and simplistic, owing to budget and time constraints. Still, there is a certain free-wheeling charm to these early efforts, even if they were little more than an attempt to cash in on the super hero craze.

By the early 50s, silver screen super heroics were on the way out in favor of TV. Aside from the *Batman* "movie" of 1966 (really just a movie-length episode of the TV series) there wouldn't be any significant comic book super heroes on the screen until *Superman* in 1978.
The 70s would bring a bunch of Marvel based TV movies such as *Dr. Strange*, *Captain America*, *Spider-Man* and others, along with a few series pilot movies for *Wonder Woman* and *The Incredible Hulk.*

For the most part, it was DC and Marvel's show at the movies for super heroes, except for the odd comic book adaptation here and there such as *Sheena*, until just after *Batman* in 1989. Batman was a turning point, a significant financial and critical hit, that pulled in many more people than just the core comic audience.

The 90s

Following the massive success of *Batman,* movies based on comic book characters became a more important focus, and money poured in to production. However, it was a mixed bag for several years, as the focus on cashing in took precedence over matters of fidelity to the characters and source material. DC would continue to sporadically release various Batman sequels and Marvel would experiment, then get right, a number of comic movies as the 90s progressed. With the intense interest and money flowing during this time, studios began looking past the Marvel-DC movie paradigm into other comic book properties that could be turned into big screen adaptations.

First up was (1990) which followed a bright, colorful and decidedly comic-book interpretation of the character. While not a big hit, *Dick Tracy* was a fairly good, if broad, big screen version, with Warren Beatty doing a respectable job as Tracy, Madonna as Breathless Mahoney and one of the largest "rogue's galleries" to be featured in a comic movie with roles played by Robert DeNiro and Dustin Hoffman. Overall, it was a movie that has been looked back on with some fondness and has fared better than at the time of its release.

A very good and faithful comic book adaptation finally arrived with (1991), a Disney production with excellent casting (Billy Campbell, Jennifer Connelly, Timothy Dalton along with many good supporting actors) and a great mix of character and action. Following closely to the story from the first several Rocketeer comic stories, the movie succeeded in being a roller-coaster ride complete with romance, spectacular flying sequences (both plane and man) and the mob taking on Nazi agents on American soil!

The Rocketeer hit all the right notes, but was only a modest success at the box office, and failed to reach much beyond the small core comic audience. It was during this early-to-mid 90s phase that most comic movies would just "bubble under" the public consciousness and remain mostly the domain of comic fans.

The one movie other than *Batman* that bucked this trend around this time was (1990). Based off the independent comic by Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird which came out in 1984, the movie built off of a large fanbase for the cartoon and toys. It was a smash financially, making $160 million domestically, but received mixed reviews from critics. It was better received by comic fans, and was a huge hit with kids. Two sequels followed in 1991 and 1993, with diminishing results. Despite the falloff in quality of the sequels, the movies did well and had good production values for the main Turtles characters in an era before computer effects would take over the visualizations of exotic characters.

(1994) would star Brandon Lee in his last role, with his on-set death by an accidental gunshot nearly taking center stage over the movie itself. In the initial release of the movie, Brandon's role would be lauded and mourned at the same time, and the movie itself would be largely overlooked outside of core comic fans. The movie would age well, however, and in retrospect be seen as a very good adaptation of the character. The movie sits squarely in the low-budget indie realm, but had good production values, some early digital effects work (particularly in the reveal of the Crow character where Brandon's face had to be digitally superimposed after his death) and was an honest and faithful take on the character. Two sequels, in 1996 and in 2000 would follow, but would suffer from poor production, acting and storytelling that drifted too far from the initial movie.

This is a pattern that would repeat itself many times with comic book based movies: Strong and promising initial movie followed by a sequel that was sometimes just weak, and sometimes actively went against all that was established and good about the original movie. It would seem that follow-on movies wouldn't "get it" and change vital elements due to a misunderstanding of the genre and characters.

Things got a bit pulpy by the mid-90s with (1994) and (1995), which for the most part got their respective characters and stories right. *The Shadow* played up its more supernatural elements while hewing fairly close to the source material, while *The Phantom* took a somewhat lighter, but not jokey, tone. Action-adventure was the order of the day, with good budgets and effects, solid if workmanlike cinematography and editing, and an appealing cast that mostly took the material seriously. These were bright, breezy adventure movies without a lot of depth, and were mostly harmless translations.

While they were considered relative failures at the box office, they nonetheless helped move things forward toward making better comic based films.

One movie that didn't help move things forward, either for the character or the industry as a whole, was (1995), a massive miss in almost every way. While it had a huge budget and excellent effects, it completely neutered the concept and appeal of the character by throwing him into a conspiracy plot and casting him out of his role as a Judge within the first 15 minutes of the movie. To add insult to injury, he only spends about *five* minutes of that 15 with his famous helmet on. From then on, its just another Sylvester Stallone action movie.

This idea of masked super heroes not wearing a mask through most of a movie would happen in many subsequent movies, usually at the behest of the main actor who doesn't want his face covered the whole movie. How they don't know what they are getting into with the masks in a *super-hero* movie is anyone's guess, but it would become a recurring theme. If you noticed I am spending more time on this topic for *Judge Dredd* than the actual story of the movie, well, then neither did they.

There would be a redemption of sorts in 2012 with , a gloriously violent, dark, brutal take on the character. Karl Urban, at risk of playing too many key characters in franchise movies, makes a great Dredd. In costume *and* helmet for the entire movie, Urban's Dredd is a gravely voiced agent of the law through and through. Borrowing the main plot from *The Raid Redemption*, where an entire apartment building is under siege in a battle between the cops and drug dealers, Dredd amps up the scale with a half-mile high building populated by tens of thousands of residents and run by drug dealer Ma-Ma, played with her usual cool menace by Lena Heady. Dredd and Cadet Anderson get trapped in the building when it goes on lockdown, and have to fight their way through 200 floors of Ma-Ma's henchmen. Lots of quality action scenes, an actual story, and well-drawn out characters make *Dredd* the movie fans have been waiting for.

The "of sorts" part comes from the movie just not doing very well at the box office. As good and faithful an adaptation as it was, *Dredd* just didn't reach out past some of the core comic audience, and got lost in the wave of Marvel movies out at the time, particularly *The Avengers*. A sequel seems unlikely, which is too bad because *Dredd* is the kind of risk-taking filmmaking comic book movies need.

(1997) would arrive just 5 years after the debut of the character, with state-of-the-art effects, a solid cast, and a story that closely followed most of the important elements of the comic. Its weird mix of hellspawn monsters and dark story and character, *Spawn* just didn't catch on with the wider movie going world, but it would come in the same year as a few other movies that would expand the market for comic based movies.

Moving Beyond Super Heroes

During this Post-*Batman* expansion period, many movies were met with disappointing box office and reception. While super-hero based movies would continue to be made and be the main attraction, movie producers began to look at other comic book properties as potential source material.

One of the first of these was (1994) starring Jim Carrey in pretty much the role that made his career take off. Carrey stars as Stanley Ipkiss, a hapless bank clerk who happens upon a magical mask that transforms him into a tasmanian devil of reality-bending proportions. Able to alter himself and his surroundings, *The Mask* takes on a gangster in singularly vivid and outrageous fashion, altering his appearance in truly comic-book ways such as making his hands into a phalanx of guns and bulging his eyes out of his head and rotating them while smacking the bad guys over the head with a sledgehammer. It was truly a live-action cartoon comic book come to life.

The Mask was one of the first movies to extensively use computer generated effects (CGI) to achieve its unreal effects. Though a bit dated by today's standards, it was the first extensive use of CGI in a comic book based movie. This began an inevitable trend that would allow movies to be able to pull off the incredible images and settings that comics could conjure up relatively easily, but were previously too complicated or expensive to do in real life.

(1996), (1996) and (1995) would follow *The Mask*. *Tank Girl* fared better than the rest at being a close approximation of the comic book, but the rest were rather poorly conceived, poorly made, and poorly received.

(1994) was one of the better to come along in this period. Utilizing the martial arts skills of Jean-Claude Van Damme as a Time Enforcement Cop caught in a web of conspiracy chasing a corrupt senator through time, *Timecop* hit all the right notes. With a good mix of time travel, paradoxes to solve, romance, action and a solid story, *Timecop* stood out among the crowd.

In 1997, was released, based on the independent comic. *MiB*, as it would come to be abbreviated, was a rollicking sci-fi/action movie with a lot of humor and great characters. Tommy Lee Jones plays K, a veteran MiB agent who recruits Will Smith's J to help him track and handle the alien presence on earth. Full of clever commentary on scifi tropes and alien species, *MiB* was a sizeable hit upon release.

There would be two sequels over the next 15 years, with diminishing returns, though *Men In Black 3* does feature a time travel story with Josh Brolin in the 60s impressively playing a young Agent K with convincing fidelity.

(1999) based on characters from *Flaming Carrot Comics*, went the satirical comedy route with it's blue-collar super hero team of second stringers must save the day from Casanova Frankenstein and his doomsday device, the Psycho-Frakulator. Featuring an impressive cast of comedic actors and slick production, the movie was a bit of a bomb upon first release. It would find cult status later on home video, and generally be remembered fondly as an undeserved miss.

(2001) would adapt the comic book by Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell featuring a 19th century murder mystery set in London. Directed with skill and atmosphere by the Hughes brothers, *From Hell* turned out to be a decent little murder mystery/horror movie. As is typical of these types of adaptations, the movie differed from the comic in many respects. Changes to the main character, the ultimate villain, and many important locales and settings would be a bridge to far for some.

As would become a common refrain, Alan Moore essentially divorced himself from the entire project, declining to even see the finished product and instead preferring to focus on his comic book efforts. His views would only deteriorate with each successive movie adapted from his works.

It was around this time that the idea of stating these movies were "based on the graphic novel" started to take hold. This phrase is often a misnomer, as the vast majority of these movies were actually based on a comic series that was then collected into a reprint trade paperback. It wouldn't sound as good to say "based on the comic book" for many more years, until the Marvel Studios movies would hit big. By that time, "a comic book movie" was no longer considered a detrimental phrase, but for many years leading up to that, one had to refer to the movie being based on the "graphic novel" for anyone to even remotely take it seriously.

(2003) would have a notorious production history. With rumors of shouting matches and even a fistfight on set between star Sean Connery and director Stephen Norrington, and based on the comic ("graphic novel") by Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill, the movie seemed destined to be controversial from every end of the spectrum. Indeed, Alan Moore once again disowned and criticized the project, swearing off Hollywood in the process, and fans turned on the movie for having changed too much from the source material. With an interesting initial premise (famous characters in literature fight evil), the movie is big, flashy, and absurd, it's actually a fairly enjoyable movie if you look at it from a 19th century perspective a'la Steampunk.

Things would become even more diverse with crime drama movies such as (2009) and (2005). Whiteout is a nice little murder mystery set in Antarctica with the requisite betrayals and snowstorm set pieces. *A History of Violence* (an actual graphic novel) was directed by David Cronenberg and starred Viggo Mortensen as a former hitman who gave up the life, but is found and stalked by his former employers thugs when he foils a robbery at the diner he works at. Full of deep characterization and great performances, A History of Violence would become a hit that most people would not even know was originally a graphic novel. It would also go on to be nominated for 2 Academy Awards.

Hellboy on paper might seem to be a bit too esoteric a comic character to adapt to the screen. It's combination of a supernatural main character, sci-fi and overall weirdness might seem to be a mish-mash and a mess, but in the capable hands of a director like Guillermo del Toro and featuring Ron Perlman in the lead role, (2004) is a comic book movie that feels right being a comic book movie. Witty and sardonic with well

drawn characters and action set pieces, *Hellboy* was a big enough success at the box office to spawn a sequel in 2008, . The sequel was equally successful with the same director and cast returning. Full of real humor, good inter-character drama that doesn't wear out its welcome, *Hellboy II* is a welcome return to the comic world of creator Mike Mignola.

(2006) made by the Wachowski brothers after finishing their Matrix trilogy and adapted from comic by Alan Moore and David Lloyd, was another adaptation that varied in a few significant ways from the source material, primarily the target of the Thatcher era Britain falling into post-apocalyptic fascism. Despite the changes, V For Vendetta was a smash hit with less politically (and particularly British politics) minded people who still got the overall message loud and clear. Directed with their usual visual kinetic energy, the Wachowski's version of this particular dystopian vision represent one of the more successful and satisfying translations of a comic book to the screen.

(2004) deserves special mention here, even though it's an animated movie and outside the scope of this article. If you are looking for a near-perfect example of how to do a super hero movie right, this is it. A family of super heroes must live a suburban life after costumed heroes are outlawed, until a super powered villain starts a ruckus. The relevance and wonder that most comic book movies struggle to achieve is effortlessly and masterfully accomplished by writer and director Brad Bird. Coming out about 6 months before the first *Fantastic Four* movie and with similar characters, *The Incredibles* did it better and set the bar very high.

Outside of the mainstream comic book movie adaptations lie a wide range of independent productions, with themes running the gamut from historical pseudo-fiction to sci-fi, to comedy and fantasy. One example of this is (2004), an interesting case of 2 movies (- 1986, - 1987) becoming comic books, then several series of comics, then combined into a "versus" comic, then *back* into a movie. It was the sort of movie fans of the comic had been clamoring for years, and when it arrived, it was a huge disappointment. Long on plot and derivative characters no one cared about and short on the actual vs. it failed on most levels to add anything to either franchise. The sequel, (2007) was a little better, and at least offered a decent amount of actual Aliens vs. Predator combat.

Frank Miller is a name well known to comic fans, and a few moviegoers might recognize his name as a screen writer from movies. After years of working in comics and dabbling in such projects as Robocop 2 and 3 where he was the screenwriter, Miller finally had one of his own comic books adapted to the screen with (2005) a hardest-of-the-hard boiled crime thriller. The comic was a black and white uber-noir with a highly stylized look and the darkest of characters as befits the title.

Sin City may be the purest comic adaptation of all time, as the director Robert Rodriguez worked with Miller on set throughout production to bring his comic to the screen with absolute fidelity. Indeed, much of the movie is verbatim shots and dialogue from the comic. Shot in high contrast black and white with spot color in places, *Sin City* represents one of the best examples of doing right by the source material. The follow up, *Sin City: A Dame To Kill For* (2014) directed by Miller and Rodriguez, came perhaps a bit too late to capitalize on the success of the original, but was a solid sequel.

The success of Sin City led Miller to try his hand at fully directing a movie based on a comic very close to his heart. The result was (2008) and was sadly a failure in almost every measure. Taken from the Will Eisner comic strip, what should have been a glorious and faithful homage to a legendary strip turned out to be a hero with no clothes. It should have been a slam-dunk: Miller, the man who used Eisner's inspirations for much of his body of work and adapted it to modern times brilliantly, bringing his direct influence to the big screen. While shot in another stylized look, the characters are flat, absurd in places they shouldn't be, melodrama taking the place of tension, and a main character that most just didn't care about.

More successful was another Miller adaptation, (2006) about the 300 Spartans who took a stand against the entire might of the army of Xerces at the Battle of Thermopylae. Directed by Zach Snyder with a significant visual flair, the movie matches shots in the comic in a similar fashion to *Sin City*, but with allowances for Snyder's particular directorial flourishes. Notable are the battles, which shift in and out of slow motion at key moments all within a single shot. It's an arresting and unique spin (now copied all over) on the traditional "slow-mo to emphasize action" motif. The sequel, (2014) was a prequel story that was had much more politics and history taking place over a longer period of time, but still had the requisite heavy blood-and-guts action expected of such violent times.

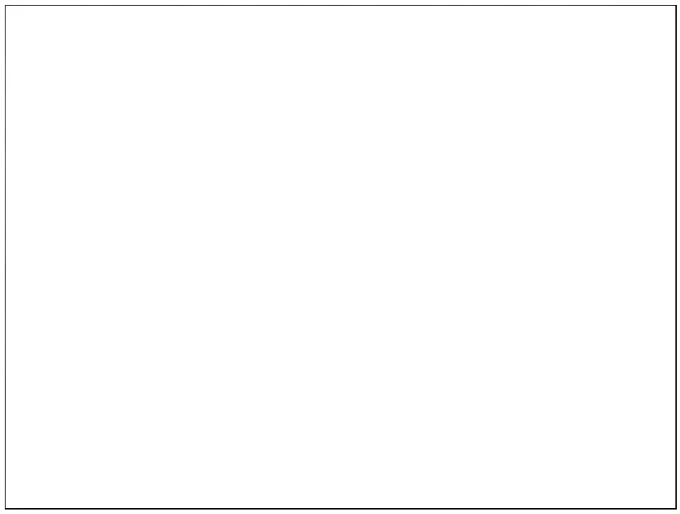
(2014) is a stylish and urbane take on the James Bond genre of spy movies. Written and directed by Matthew Vaughn, adapted from the actual *comic book* (and credited so) by Mark Millar and Dave Gibbons, *Kingsman* is a slick and fun ride that follows the recruitment of a new agent against the backdrop of a rising global threat from an insane technology guru.

Comic book movies have become so successful in recent years that they are even spawning new super-hero movies that are original for the screen and not based on a previous comic. Movies like *Unbreakable*, *Alter Egos*, *Jumper*, *Push*, *Chronicle*, *Birdman*, *I Am Number Four*, *Hancock*, *My Super Ex-Girlfriend*, *The Covenant*, *Super*, *Sky High*, and *Zoom* are coming out with increasing regularity. They draw from the inspiration of comic book sources and are riding the current wave of comic book movie popularity into what is becoming a golden age of comic book movies.

"The Super Type of Ira Schnapp - Part One"

by Arlen Schumer

Would you believe that the artist who designed in engraved Roman letters the slogan, "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night..." atop New York City's main post office at Penn Station is the same man who designed the famous, iconic Superman comic book logo?



Both are the works of **Ira Schnapp** (1892-1969), a descendant of stonecutters, calligrapher and hand-letterer who defined the "house style" of DC Comics for over 30 years, starting with the Action Comics logo on the cover of Superman's first appearance in 1938, and continuing with scores of others for the company, including hundreds of house ads promoting their monthly comics that are among some of the greatest examples of hand-lettering in the 20th Century.

Yet, for all of his ubiquitous works, to the comic book audience, as well as comic book historians, and of course the general audience, Schnapp's name and legacy are unknown and forgotten. But I aim to change that with my lecture and collateral exhibit on Schnapp for the Type Directors Club of New York; the lecture will open the exhibit Thursday night, May 14th, and it'll run through the summer, until September 25th.

Like an entire generation, I grew up with Schnapp's DC Comics logos and house ads, and always loved them without ever knowing his name; it wasn't until relatively recently that his name leaked out in various fanzines and such (and thanks to the great comics history blog, Robby Reed's we wouldn't know much of anything about Schnapp: http://www.dialbforblog.com/archives/372/).

Schnapp's career peak came during the Silver Age of Comics (circa 1956-70), so my book, (Archway Publishing) is a bit of a showcase for Schnapp's work in the DC artists' chapters. In my own comic book-style illustration work over the course of my career, I've kept keeps Schnapp's style alive by incorporating his unique hand-lettered fonts into my own comic book-styled illustration and design, which you can see here: (http://www.arlenschumer.com/illustration.html)

So I'm really excited that the Type Directors Club in New York has afforded me the space to create a dream come true: an exhibit of Schnapp's "greatest hits" on a grand scale—I'm getting to blow up his Superman logo 14 feet long—befitting his legacy! Finally both comic fans and New Yorkers—and visiting tourists, because the exhibit will be up all summer—will know who created some of the most ubiquitous graphic icons of their lives! And they'll see his work via fresh eyes, as I can promise you the exhibit is as groundbreaking an exhibit design as Schnapp's designs were idealized classics!

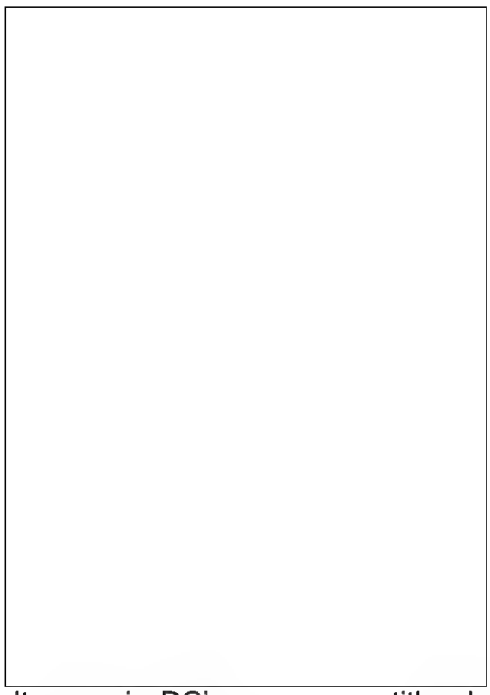
My sixteen favorite DC Comics logos by Schnapp!

They span the years 1949 #1) to 1968 (both the Deadman and Strange Adventures logos on the same cover of #213), spanning the "Golden Age" of comics (if you count the large Action Comics logo Schnapp designed in 1938 that forms the background of the above image, a mockup of a 10-foot long by 66" high by 24" deep display I've designed for the Type Directors Club exhibit) to the Silver Age, and display the depth and breadth of Schnapp's design skills and talent that gave DC Comics its "house" look for generations, one that is still in evidence today.

You have to marvel (pun intended) at the variety of look and style of Schnapp's DC logos here, and how they visually bring each title's characteristics to life, making the letterforms look and feel and sound, onomatopoeically, like the words themselves, in an artistic, typographic tour-de-force—from the "fast" font of to the faux-metal letters of from the spookiness of moody masthead to the shield-like logo, Schnapp giving it that legal look you want in such an officious title! shivery letters are suitably "strange," are creepily gothic, and look inflated like balloon animals.

There's something for everyone at the Schnapp smorgasbord!

The Silver Age of Comics began out of the ashes of the end of the Golden Age, when the superhero genre died out by the early 1950s. With the establishment of the Comics Code in 1954 effectively killing the horror and crime genres, publishers began looking for new successes.



It came in DC's title, designed to test out new concepts, like issue #1's "Fire Fighters," seen in Schnapp's '56 house ad. It wasn't until DC decided to bring back, in #4, The Flash, their super-speedster who had last been published in '51—but now in a totally new costume— did DC have a hit, and The Silver Age of Comics was born!

And Schnapp was there to give it its graphic identity, via the distinctive logos, cover lettering and "house" ads (ads that promote a company's own products in their own publications) he would provide for the plethora of titles that followed in Flash's wake, that have proven to be as timeless, artistically, as the great art, and artists, Schnapp's works supported and shined on!

Like that of Carmine Infantino (his Adam Strange on the '64 cover has a logo by Schnapp, natch!), whose art and career development at DC (look at the quantum leap in style Infantino made between his 1950 cover and the '64 , sublime in its contrapuntal angles and aggressive design compared to its staid forerunner), and uncannily matches Schnapp's, as Infantino's style became the dominant look of DC's Silver Age!

Dale's Comic Fanzine Price Guide 2015 Second Edition

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After 3 years, it's back! A big, new fully revised 2nd Edition of Dale's Comic Fanzine Price Guide, the first and only comprehensive price and information guide for comic fanzines and comic related publications!

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Welcome to Fanzine Corner, a special place within CFQ where we will spotlight information about the wonderful world of fanzines! In this inaugural installment, we will be taking a look at some news and info that has occurred since the 2nd edition of Dale's Comic Fanzine Price Guide came out including sales of fanzines, and part 1 of a 2 part index to the classic EC fanzine Squa Tront.

The months since the 2nd edition of the Fanzine Guide came out have seen a sizeable increase in fanzine interest and activity, and this was in the usually slower winter months.

I attended 2 comic cons in April, and noticed that fanzines are starting to get out onto a more diverse set of dealers displays. In many of these cases, what you end up finding is pretty random and only a handful of fanzines, but it's progress nonetheless. I traded a copy of the Fanzine Guide for a couple of issues of Tomorrows Comics fanzine, which was nearly all the fanzines that dealer had at that show, but that dealer also just started to carry *any* fanzines at shows.

Over on eBay, there has been quite a bit more activity. Fanzine sales there have increased significantly since last year, in both dollar amounts and items sold. As a result, we are seeing more previously unseen and undiscovered fanzines turning up and being offered to the market. Many wonderful and legendary fanzines are seeing the light of day for the first time in decades

The Fan Clubs & Zines area of comic collectibles on eBay is over 2500 auctions, which is a considerably larger than, well, ever. Granted many of these are scifi and fantasy fanzines, but the comic book fanzines there now have a very good depth and quantity. There are not as many modern (80s-00s) fanzines as you would think.

Below is part 1 of a 2 part sales report for the period since the Fanzine Guide came out. Pre-1970s fanzines still rule the roost in term of sales and demand. It's still very volatile, both with values and what is selling. Issue #3 of a 60s fanzine might sell for $600 while issue #4 languishes at $100, even though there is nothing particularly notable about either.

Squa Tront #1

1967
Cover Price: 75¢
Side Stapled (1st print)
Saddle-Stitched (2nd print)
Publisher and Editor: Jerry Weist
Editorial Advisor and Staff Artist: Roger Hill

Contents
Front and Back Cover: Roger Hill
Spot art and illustrations: Roger Hill throughout
Editorial: Jerry Weist

" " by Jerry Weist, Al Williamson and Reed Crandall (10 pages)
-Title banner art for the article by Al Williamson
- Photo of Al Williamson
- **Illustrations:** Al Williamson and Reed Crandall
Review of the King Features comic.

" " by Roger Hill (6 pages)
- **Inks:** Reed Crandall
Biography of Graham "Ghastly" Ingles.

" " (6 pages)
- **Writer:** Jerry Weist
- **Art:** Rick Showalter and Bob Barrett
Comic strip about a mile-diameter rocket travels back to earth in the year 3767 to replenish much needed minerals essential to earth's huge industries.

" " (8 pages)
- **Illustrations:** Bob Showalter
Portfolio of the EC annuals.

" " by Bob Barrett (4 pages)
Overview of Frank Frazetta's involvement with EC.

" " by Jerry Weist (1 page)
- Reproduction of #214 which featured a Buck Rogers cover by Frank Frazetta that had a distinctly EC feel.

Squa Tront #2

1968
Cover Price: 75¢ (1st print), No Price (2nd Print)
Saddle-Stitched
Publisher and Editor: Jerry Weist
Editorial Advisor and Staff Artist: Roger Hill
Frazetta Editor and Staff Artist: Bob Barrett

Contents
Front Cover: Al Williamson
Back Cover: Reed Crandall
Spot art and illustrations: Roger Hill throughout
Editorial: Jerry Weist

Issue dedicated to Larry Stark

Table of Contents illustration: Frank Frazetta and Al Williamson

" " (6 pages)
by Jerry Weist and Harvey Kurtzman

" " (12 pages)
Various sketches and preliminary drawings by Al Williamson.

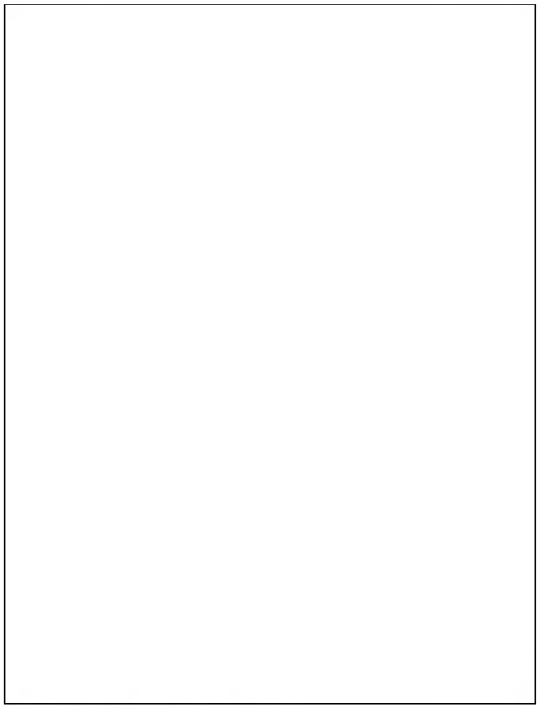
" " by Bob Barrett (6 pages)
Reprints the unpublished strips Frank did in 1948, and the article covers his other newspaper strip work.

"
1 page bio of Wrightson by himself and 3 pages of art.

"New York -- 1968" (4 pages)
Report on the 25th World Science Fiction Convention in New York, and photos from a visit to Al Williamson's home.

#29 cover

" " (6 pages)
Portfolio of covers. #9, #16, #19, #25, #29, and #31.



Squa Tront #7

1977
Cover Price: $4
Saddle-Stitched
Publisher Emeritus: Jerry Weist
Editor and Publisher: John Benson
Staff: Roger HIll, Bill Peckmann, Richard Garrison

Contents
Front and Back Cover: Roy G. Krenkel
Inside Front Cover: Bernard Krigstein
Inside Back Cover: Al Williamson
One-page gag strip by Bill Elder

Letters (4 pages)

" " (12 pages)
Many preliminary and sketches of Krenkel's cover concepts for Creepy that never saw print.

" " (4 pages)
Examples of comics that swiped art and layouts from EC comics.

" " (16 pages)
- **Art:** Harvey Kurtzman
Full color comic story of Lucky, 'that ignorant, ignorant cowboy."

" " (5 pages)
by John Benson
Covers mostly Potrzebie and Larry Stark fanzines.

" " by Larry Stark (2 pages)
Reprint from

" " by Larry Stark (4 pages)
Overview of Jack Davis' animated work in TV and movies.

" " (1 page)
- **Art:** Bill Elder
Pin-up of the EC staff.

" " (3 pages)

Squa Tront #8

1978
Cover Price: None
Saddle-Stitched
Publisher Emeritus: Jerry Weist
Editor and Publisher: John Benson
Staff: Roger HIll, Bill Peckmann

Contents
Front and Back Cover: Jack Davis
Inside Front and Back Cover: Roy G. Krenkel

" " (3 pages)
by John Benson
The Dallas and Texas Trio fanzine publishers.

" " (4 pages)
by John Benson
Overview of fanzines.

" " (3 pages)
Examples of comics that swiped art and layouts from EC comics.

" " by Al Williamson (6 pages)
A sampling of drawings tracing the evolution of Al's style over 15 years from before, during and after EC from 1947 to 1963.

" " (24 pages)
by John Benson, Bhob Stewart, Bruce Hershenson, Ron Barlow

" " (9 pages)
- **Art:** Al Feldstein
Pencil originals of the "Lashes to Lashes" story.

Letters (4 pages)

" " by Johnny Craig (4 pages)
Portfolio of covers. #2, #4, #5, #6, #9, #8, #9, #10, #12, #13.

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